

DEPARTMENT OF STATE  
WASHINGTON

May 9, 1961

Dear Mr. President:

I was glad to read your Press Conference remarks on some of our accomplishments in foreign affairs which help to balance the more highly publicized set-backs.

I have been deeply concerned by the extent to which so many correspondents, members of Congress and even government officials have accepted the thesis that the Communists everywhere are triumphantly on the march, while we remain ineffective and generally on the defensive.

Although this is precisely the impression that the Kremlin is seeking to promote, it will not stand up under thoughtful examination. Three weeks ago, just before the Cuban episode, an objective balance sheet of the world situation would include the following:

1. Under your guidance American leadership was being re-established in Europe. A new U.S. program had been developed for revitalizing NATO which the British and, in considerable degree, the Germans had enthusiastically accepted. The Anglo-American relationship was in a healthier state following the Macmillan visit than at any time since the days of the Marshall Plan.
2. These gains in our relations with our NATO allies were achieved in spite of the fact that we had taken a much more forthright position in regard to colonial Africa.

The President,  
The White House.

Since the summer of 1960 the Soviet Union had lost considerable ground there. Instead of taking over the Congo, as had been widely predicted last August, the Kremlin had found its influence greatly lessened and its physical presence largely eliminated.

Guinea, Ghana, and Mali, which Chris Herter described last fall as being in the Soviet camp, had pulled away somewhat from the Soviet Union and were now more amicably disposed towards us.

3. In the United Nations our position had been substantially improved from the nadir of last fall. We had associated ourselves effectively with the Asians, Africans, and Latin Americans on most issues, while the Soviet Union had found itself on the losing side on many key votes.

4. Our relations with India in particular had also been substantially improved. Nehru had demonstrated an increasing understanding of the pressures from Communist China and a deepening respect for you personally.

Moreover, the Indian economy had been picking up rapidly, with the industrial sector growing at the rate of 14 per cent annually. The Communist government in Kerala had been eliminated.

5. In Malaya, a stable government had emerged in a country which a few years ago appeared on the verge of take-over by Communist guerrillas. Singapore, in the face of a most pessimistic forecast, had achieved a relatively stable non-Communist government.

6. The Communist-led Huk rebellion in the Philippines had been eliminated.

7. In the last year our relations with Japan had greatly improved. This had been reflected in the attitudes of the young intellectuals, labor groups, and teachers who had been the sharpest critics of United States policy.

8. The framework of a new aid program had been presented to Congress that took into account the mistakes of the last decade and promised major gains in political as well as economic effectiveness.

9. A reorganization of our military operations had also been outlined to Congress which promised a much more effective defense structure. These strengthening proposals, which had been launched without placing us in a provocative military posture, had won wide acceptance in Congress.

10. Although we had nothing tangible to show for our efforts to establish more rational relations with the Soviet Union, the atmosphere, at least, had substantially improved. The Berlin question, which many observers predicted would blow up immediately after you took office, appeared unlikely to become explosive before late fall.

11. We had responded affirmatively to the emerging lines of Castro's regime in Cuba by developing a new program for all of Latin America which had won the acclaim of the entire hemisphere.

The \$600 million program which you proposed went through the Congressional Committees without a reduction -- the first time this had happened in anyone's memory.

This was the situation which existed three weeks ago. Since then, we have suffered the following three set-backs:

1. The Soviet Union shot a man into space, as our scientists had forecast.

2. The Laotian situation was ignited dangerously and predictably.

3. We misfired in Cuba.

Yet on balance I submit that in the first three months the record of your administration in foreign affairs was no less than extraordinary. The task at hand, as I see it, is to recapture the initiative which we had assumed and to strengthen the confidence of the non-Communist people in our capacity to lead.

One final thought on Cuba: I believe our greatest mistake was our initial assumption that we could not tolerate Castro's dominance there and that time was on his side.

Although Cuba is a supreme irritant, it is not now nor will it be in the near future a primary danger to us. It is wishful thinking to assume that under present circumstances the Castro government can be brought down from within. As the Cuban people grow more disenchanted with Castro, the capacity of his police apparatus to control the dissidents will also increase, and the result is likely to be a stand-off.

Yet Castro's scope for effective action outside of Cuba is strictly limited.

If he attempts to use his growing military power across open water against Haiti, Jamaica, or Central American countries, we can easily (and legally) overthrow him in cooperation with other Latin American states under the treaty of the Organization of American States.

If, on the other hand, he refrains from overt military action and attempts to undermine Latin American governments by propaganda, I am also skeptical of his success.

The trend in Latin America is opposed to dictatorships, and Castro will increasingly appear in the familiar pattern, only somewhat more bloody-handed. The fact that the basis of his power lies in a Communist dictatorship nine thousand miles away will further undercut his appeal to Latin Americans.

The United States of America, with its 180 million people, is the most powerful nation on earth. When we over-react to Castro and to Cuba with its 6 million, we vastly increase his prestige, not only in Cuba but throughout the world.

There are, of course, useful moves that we can and should make. But I believe it is vitally important to keep them out of the newspapers, to work quietly, and above all to switch our public focus back to the affirmative programs which the non-Communist world so desperately wants to associate with the United States of America.

With my warmest regards,

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Chet Baker". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large, stylized 'C' at the beginning.

Acting Secretary